

## Colville Forest Plan Revision

### Motorized Recreation Community of Interest Meeting

March 23, 2016

5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Spokane Community College/Institute for Extended Learning, Colville, WA

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#### Meeting Purpose and Overview

The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (U.S. Institute<sup>1</sup>), hosted a Motorized Recreation Community of Interest meeting for the Colville National Forest Plan Revision process in Colville, Washington on March 23, 2016. The meeting provided a combination of formats including a presentation, full group and table group discussion, and question and response. Invited representatives from motorized recreation organizations active on the Colville National Forest attended the meeting, as well as U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) staff from the Colville National Forest (Attachment A). The meeting was facilitated by Susan Hayman and Tricia Tillmann, EnviroIssues, contracted to provide third-party neutral services on behalf of the U.S. Institute.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to provide participants an opportunity to learn about the U.S. Forest Service's proposals for long-term management of the Colville National Forest, with a particular focus on how the proposals could affect motorized recreation activity on the forest. Proposals were developed in cooperation with seven cooperating entities<sup>2</sup> and with input from the public and interest groups. The DEIS describes and analyzes six alternatives for long-term management of the forest. **The draft plan reflects the Forest Service Preferred Alternative identified in the DEIS, which is Alternative P.** Participants also received information on how to comment on the proposals, how their comments will be used, and ongoing and future opportunities to be involved in the forest plan revision process.

#### Meeting Agenda

Susan Hayman, EnviroIssues facilitator, welcomed everyone and explained the meeting objectives, agenda, and meeting conduct. She spoke briefly about the value of public participation in the forest plan revision process and encouraged participants to share what they learn with their organizations and communities. She explained Forest Service staff were present as subject matter experts on forest plan revision and were participants, not hosts, of the meeting.

#### Presentation

Following introductions by everyone present at the meeting, Susan invited Amy Dillon, Forest Plan Revision Team Leader, to present the key concepts relevant to motorized recreation interests. Amy reviewed the purpose and scope of forest plans, including what forest plans can and cannot change. She also covered the need for change, key issues that informed the development of alternatives, how riparian management and wildlife habitat are addressed, and key differences between the alternatives

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Institute, under federal law, helps federal agencies and other affected stakeholders address environmental disputes, conflicts, and challenges through programs and services that provide situation assessments; conflict resolution; facilitated collaboration; and capacity building. The U.S. Institute is a program within the Udall Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> The seven cooperating entities are the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Kalispel Tribe, Spokane Tribe of Indians, the State of Washington, and Ferry, Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties in the State of Washington.

for motorized recreation use. The key differences between alternatives for motorized recreation use are:

- Percent of forest suitable for roads under each alternative
- Whether existing motorized trails would be able to continue in an area recommended for wilderness. If Alternatives B or R were selected, 39 miles of existing motorized recreation trails would no longer be available for motorized recreation use.
- Establishment of a recreation Special Interest Area, which includes motorized off-highway vehicle use

Amy concluded the presentation by reviewing the maps around the room, which show each alternative, existing roads, key wildlife habitat and watershed areas, and inventoried roadless areas (IRAs). She invited each organization to take a set of alternative maps back to their membership.

Please see Attachment B (provided in a separate file) to view the presentation slides.

### **Questions & Answers (Q&A) | Full Group Discussion**

The following is a summary of questions (Q), comments (C), and corresponding responses (R) from the full group discussion. Participants generated questions through a small group discussion at their table, then proposed a single question from their table for the full group discussion. Additional table questions were addressed as time allowed. Representatives of the motorized recreation groups present provided all questions and comments. Unless otherwise indicated, the Forest Service participants provided the responses.

**Q: Is there a limit on how long the Forest Service can establish a recommended wilderness area or study area before it reverts back to the prior management area?**

R: There is no limit. An area that is recommended wilderness would stay recommended wilderness until Congress designates it as wilderness or until there is another forest plan revision that changes the recommendation.

**Q: Would it take an act of Congress to pull an area out of designated wilderness as well as designate it wilderness?**

R: Yes, it would.

**Q: If an area is recommended as wilderness, is it managed as wilderness? The Forest Service can recommend land for Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), which then become potential wilderness areas. It seems the Forest Service could make a recommendation to reduce IRAs.**

R: If Alternatives R or B were selected, recommended wilderness within those alternatives would basically be treated and managed as wilderness. Associated uses such as mountain bikes and chainsaws would not be allowed. In all other alternatives, the land would be managed as it currently is unless and until Congress designates it as wilderness.

To change or take action on an IRA is a decision made at the Forest Service's Regional Office level. There is likely a process for changing those IRAs, but it is not at the forest plan revision level.

**C: Forest plan revision does not change IRAs, but it could make a recommendation on IRAs. We often start from the place of adding more IRAs, but there is a process for removing them that we can keep in the back of our mind.**

R: The starting point for IRAs in the forest plan revision process is from Appendix C in the 1988 forest plan, which is based on the work completed in the Roadless Area Review & Evaluation (RARE) I and II and is also linked to the 2001 Roadless Rule.

**Q: Could new roads be added? We previously heard from the Forest Service that if a road is removed for whatever reason (for example, at the conclusion of logging), there would be no new roads added and therefore a negative gain on roads.**

R: On the 75-82% of the forest where roads are suitable under each alternative, new roads could be added on most of the forest at the project level. There are also some trails. In some alternatives, there is a cap on road miles, for example in Alternative B there is a 4,000-mile cap on road miles. Some alternatives have a desired condition for a certain road density that varies. A place important for water quality, for example, may be moving toward a desired condition that has a particular road density associated with it. None of the current alternatives prohibit building roads.

**Q: Doesn't the plan say no new road designations? There can be 45 miles of mixed use road added over the next 15 years through the South End Motorized Recreation Project. If the Forest Service changes the road designation on 13 miles from over-highway vehicle use to mixed use, would that account for 13 of the 45 miles?**

R: The 45 miles of mixed use road in the draft plan would not be affected by the South End Project designations that are underway now, before the revised plan takes effect.

**Q: What about downgrading the maintenance levels of roads, given the lack of money from Congress? We know the Forest Service does not have money to maintain roads, but we never talk about reducing the maintenance level of roads as a way to save money.**

R: Downgrading the maintenance level of roads is done at the project level, not the plan level, because it is specific to an area and can affect how people access the area. Changing the maintenance level of a road requires a separate public involvement process.

**Q: How does the lack of budget affect the draft forest plan?**

R: Some of the numbers in the plan were selected based on past budgets and input from the Regional Office. If the Forest Service gets more money, it can do more.

**C: Motorized recreation groups don't want more wilderness, so you are asking us to choose between the least of evils.**

**Q: It is very difficult to coordinate motor vehicle use areas (shown on the motorized vehicle use maps, or MVUM) with the plan alternatives. Is there some way to layer these maps so we can tell what the effects will be and where they will be? We don't know which trails will be affected.**

R: [non-Forest Service participant] There are GIS files available for download on the Forest Plan Revision website. There is a GIS file for Google Earth that shows all the management areas which can be overlain with trails. The interactive map on the Forest Service website is very slow.

R: [Forest Service Participant] The Kettle Crest SIA includes the Twin Sisters and allows motorized use in that backcountry setting. Under Alternatives R and B, Owl Mountain, everything in Twin Sisters, two trails in Huckleberry and Jackknife (Thompson Ridge) are included in areas proposed as recommended wilderness. If one of these alternatives were selected, these areas would be closed to motorized uses upon the Regional Forester's signature of the decision.

**Q: We thought the Proposed Action was what the Forest Service wanted to do, but now realize it is Alternative P. That was not clear. Are the Proposed Action Alternative and Alternative P the same?**

R: No. The No Action Alternative reflects the 1988 forest plan. This is what is in place now. The Proposed Action was released for public comment in 2011. Based on the 2011 comments, the Forest Service created four new, different alternatives. The Forest Service identified Alternative P as its Preferred Alternative. The proposed draft plan is based on Alternative P.

**Q: We have a lot of snowmobile trails in the Mt. Baldy area. It looks like those are unaffected. Up in Paupac, some areas appear to be designated as backcountry non-motorized. Would any portion of that be affected by the backcountry non-motorized designation? In Harvey Creek and Bunchgrass, Bunchgrass is a study area where we don't ride but we have been able to ride around there and it appears we lose all of that under the Proposed Action Alternative and Alternative P. Is that correct?**

R: The over-snow groomed routes would remain open. For the Proposed Action Alternative and Alternative P, any route that is currently a designated snowmobile route would stay that way. The more specific locations will require follow-up to provide an accurate answer. It is different between alternatives.

**Q: Do the Salmo-Priest Wilderness and woodland caribou critical habitat expansion or contraction require congressional designation?**

R: The Salmo-Priest Wilderness is a congressional designation. The identification of woodland caribou critical habitat is a long, scientific process (a recovery plan) and is not designated by Congress.

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## Questions & Answers (Q&A) | Table Groups

After a short break, participants gathered at three tables and at maps posted on the wall around the room to discuss how the draft plan and proposed alternatives could affect three types of motorized recreation use on different areas of the Colville National Forest: all-terrain vehicles (ATV), over-snow, and full-sized/Jeep. A fourth group for single track was available, but no one joined the table. Each table had eight large maps, one each for the six alternatives, a detailed map for Alternative P (Forest Service Preferred Alternative), a map of critical wildlife and key watershed areas on the forest, and a map of inventoried roadless areas. Maps of the forest road and trail system were also posted around the room. At the end of the small group discussion, participants shared their observations with the full group.

## ATVs

Participants stated they learned that under some alternatives, motorized routes through a recommended wilderness can remain accessible and usable until the area is designated as wilderness. They suggested boundaries may need to be adjusted to avoid interrupting the urban-wildland and rural interfaces. Participants observed there were financial trade-offs with the Forest Service selecting Alternative R or B, because funding would be lost when motorized routes in the recommended wilderness areas are no longer usable. They noted the Idaho Panhandle Trailriders Association did a travel analysis report. It included a financial appendix with the cost of decommissioning a road and concluded it would take 30 years to recoup the cost of decommissioning a road.

## Over-snow

Participants said they learned that any of the alternatives can change based on the comments submitted in the public comment period. One participant strongly encouraged the group to stick with the process and not give up. They emphasized the importance of submitting comments, especially specific comments with a solution and a description of the personal impact alternatives would have if selected. Some participants suggested the most well-organized group would have their interests reflected in the forest plan and expressed dissatisfaction with recommended wilderness as a management area.

## Single track

While no one joined the single track discussion group, other meeting participants noted motorcycle trails do not link well with other roads. Non-street-legal motorcyclists can be ticketed for being on a Forest Service road when they are only trying to get to another single-track trail. The Forest Service noted this situation is addressed at the project level.

## Full sized/Jeep

Only one person participated at the full sized/Jeep group table, and referenced the need for more detailed review of GIS maps.

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## Questions & Answers (Q&A) | Additional questions

Susan Hayman asked participants for any final questions.

**Q: Is it the intent of the Forest Service to expand the South End Motorized Recreation Project beyond the current 45 miles of motorized trails?**

A: The South End project is related to the Travel Management Plan, rather than the forest plan.

**C: The economy in Lone and Metaline Falls has been struggling. Increased tourism would be helpful, but the Forest Service says it will take two years to get approval for a short 2-3 mile road that will improve motorized recreation use in the area. Some small businesses do not have that long.**

**C: Designating more wilderness will crowd other areas and result in more intense use, which will result in someone suggesting that area needs to be fixed and become wilderness.**

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## Next steps

Susan invited Amy Dillon to review opportunities to comment on the draft revised forest plan and DEIS, and participate in the overall public involvement process. Amy explained the comment period was extended 45 days and now ends July 5, 2016. Anyone can comment during this time via email, the website, and toward the end of the comment period, through listening sessions. The listening sessions have not yet been scheduled because the comment period was just extended. Once all comments are submitted, the Forest Service reviews the comments and determines if changes to the alternatives are needed, and/or if an entirely new alternative is needed. Then, the Forest Service has an internal review with the Forest Service Regional and Washington offices. The Forest Service anticipates the final revised forest plan documents in early spring 2017 if all goes well. There is an opportunity to file an objection between the release of the final documents and the record of decision. If someone has commented during a public comment period, they have standing to object at this time if they choose to do so.

Participants were reminded that the draft revised forest plan is based on Alternative P, and to please refer to that map for the Forest Service Preferred Alternative. Five other alternatives were considered. Participants were encouraged to comment on both the things they like and don't like about all the alternatives (not just Alternative P). It is helpful to have both perspectives.

Susan concluded the meeting by encouraging participants to share what they learned with their networks and let the Forest Service know about good community events to attend. She reviewed the project information card, public involvement one-pager, and feedback form for submittal at the meeting or electronically following the meeting. She also reviewed a potential upcoming public involvement opportunity following the conclusion of the public comment period to problem-solve around key issues that arise during the comment period. These Topical Work Groups would be by invitation and open to the public to observe.

Susan thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting.

## Attachment A. Participants

Name	Organization
Amy Dillon	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Bob Blyton	Eastern Washington ATV Association
Dave Magart	Chewelah Sno Posse
Debbie Kelly	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Eric McQuay	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Eugene Fisher	Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association
Frank Young	Spokane Winter Knights
Franklin Pemberton	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Gary Nielsen	Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association
Gary Prewitt	Eastern Washington ATV Association
Glen Mumm	Spokane Winter Knights
Greg Figg	Spokane Winter Knights
Hugh Bartleson	Eastern Washington ATV Association
Jerry Attebery	Eastern Washington ATV Association
John Walker	Colville Drift Riders
Ken Timmreck	Selkirk Trailblazers
Marcy Rumelhart	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Merrill Ott	Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association
Mike Blankenship	Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association
Paul Yelk	Washington Off Highway Vehicle Alliance
Rodney Smoldon	U.S. Forest Service – Colville National Forest
Stan Christie	Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association
Tim Ibbetson	Selkirk Trailblazers